

2014 Convention Program Summaries

For those of you who either couldn't make it to the annual convention or attend every workshop we asked presenters to share summaries of their programs in the newsletter.

Thank you to those of you who allowed us to include these in our newsletter!

Assessing for Harm to Others: Guiding Principles for Assessing Violence Risk: A BioPsychoSocial Model

Meggen B Sixbey, Ph.D.

Program Abstract:

University personnel are increasingly asked to assess students' potential to harm others without adequate training and subsequent discomfort in this area. This interactive program presents the BioPsychoSocial model of harm assessment. The model assesses potential for violence across 18 risk factors and 3 domains, guiding personnel to gather and consider divergent sources of information to support a comprehensive and culturally competent decision. Presenters will also address the model's utility for distinguishing types of threats, stalking behaviors, and ethical dilemmas

Program Description:

In an era of traumatic school and community violence, helping professionals face increasing pressure to assess clients' potential to harm others (Davenport, 2009) as well as heightened public and legal scrutiny regarding their decisions in cases where violence occurs (retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2013/01/15/justice/colorado-theater-shooting-lawsuit/index.html>). However, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD, 2012) has unequivocally stated that methods for predicting violent action are inaccurate and unreliable, with violence mitigation efforts best directed at effective intervention—and thus prevention—prior to violent action. Given the limitations of violence prediction and the reality that counselors and university personnel must still assess and make recommendations about students at various points along the progression from ideation to violent action (Knoll, 2009), university personnel can benefit from exposure to/review of an established and comprehensive model of harm assessment (Meloy, 2000) to guide their decision-making and better protect themselves, their students, and the public in this challenging area of practice.

However, while university personnel are often frequently trained in assessment of warning signs regarding danger to self (e.g., risk of suicidal action), they are not as prepared to conduct assessments of students' potential to harm others (e.g., degree of homicidal ideation and intention) (Davenport, 2009; Khubchandani et al., 2012; Reeves, Wheeler, & Bowl, 2004). The Centers for Disease Control (CDC, 2013) identify violence as a "serious problem" affecting people in all stages of life, with the 2012 CDC statistics on homicide and death by firearms projected to remain at the current level. Thus, it is imperative that university personnel are well-trained to assess for students' desire and potential to harm others, just as they are trained to assess harm to self (Knoll, 2009). By providing university personnel with education, practice, and follow-up discussion in violent risk assessment, attendees will feel more confident and

better able to provide such an assessment. This skill will allow them to promote more effective violence intervention and prevention strategies in their workplaces, while also understanding what they reasonably can and cannot do in the violence risk assessment process.

A person's desire, capacity, and intent to inflict violence on others is complex and layered and thus best assessed with a multifaceted, multimodal assessment tool (Fabian, 2010). Meloy (2000) has developed a highly-regarded BioPsychoSocial Model for assessment (Fabian, 2012). Individuals using the BioPsychoSocial model can avoid focusing solely on domains that are familiar to them by examining 18 risk factors for potential to do violence across 3 domains. This model utilizes a systems approach for gathering and considering divergent sources of information to guide individuals in arriving at a comprehensive and culturally competent decision. With data gained from a completed BioPsychoSocial assessment, individuals can also be more fully informed regarding other alarming behavioral issues such as the types and severity of verbal threats (O'Toole, 2000), stalking behaviors (Mullen, 1999), and potential/actual threats against the clinician (Simon & Tardiff, 2008).

Given that individuals who pose a potential danger to others can present for services in any university setting, this program has been developed for the university professional working (or intending to work) a higher educational institution. Additionally, counselor educators who teach in the areas of crisis intervention, consultation, and ethics and legal issues will benefit from learning or reviewing a comprehensive model of harm assessment.

This program will employ several methods of presentation: PowerPoint presentation, didactic components, interactive group discussions, and an experiential multi-phased case scenario.

Presenters are doctoral clinical faculty and co-direct a crisis and emergency center at a large academic institution. They teach and provide supervision in crisis intervention and consultation and offer trainings on suicide prevention, conflict management, and involuntary hospitalization. Collectively they have over 15 years of experience in crisis intervention, behavioral consultation, and trauma-responsive counseling in higher educational settings, and 12 years in community crisis counseling and consultation services. Presenters are active members of a multidisciplinary threat assessment team and work extensively with and provide training to law enforcement, faculty, staff, and community members on effective intervention with distressed and disturbed persons. They have presented nationally on the counselor's role in behavioral health consultation and risk assessment and have spoken on expert panels regarding successful mental health/law enforcement collaborations.

References

- American College Health Association. Retrieved from the following site on May 27, 2013 from: http://www.acha-ncha.org/docs/ACHA-NCHA-II_ReferenceGroup_ExecutiveSummary_Spring2012.pdf
- Centers for Disease Control. Retrieved on May 27, 2013 from: <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention>
- Davenport, R. (2009). From College Counselor to "Risk Manager": The Evolving Nature of College Counseling on Today's Campuses. *Journal Of American College Health, 58*(2), 181-183.
- Khubchandani, J, Price, J.H. Thompson, A, Drake, J.A., Wiblishauser, M. Telljoham S. (2012). Assessing dating violence: a national assessment of school counselors' perceptions and practices. *Pediatrics* 130(2), 202-210.0
- Meloy, Reid (2000). *Violence Risk and Threat Assessment*. Specialized Training Services, San Diego:CA.
- Mullen, P.E., Pathe, M., Purcell, R. et al. (1999). *A study of stalkers*. *American Journal of Psychiatry* 156:1244-1249.
- O'Toole, M. E., (2000). *The School Shooter: A threat assessment perspective*. Critical Incident Response Group (CIRG) National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC) FBI Academy Quantico, Virginia.
- Reeves, A., Wheeler, S., & Bowl, R. (2004). Assessing risk: confrontation or avoidance-- what is taught on counsellor training courses. *British Journal Of Guidance & Counselling, 32*(2), 235-247.
- Simon, Robert I. & Tardiff, Kenneth (Eds), (2008). *Textbook of Violence Assessment and Management*. American Psychiatric Publishing, Arlington: VA.
- <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1359178911000899>
- Knoll, J L IV, 2009 book Violence Risk Assessment for Mental Health Professionals <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9780470061589.fsa639/abstrac>

Learning objectives

- 1) Increase awareness of the nature and types of threatening and aggressive behaviors;
- 2) Gain exposure to and practice with a multimodal model for assessing potential to harm others and a stalking typology to assist with threat assessment; and
- 3) Review and/or increase knowledge of critical concerns in the harm to others assessment process, such as confidentiality, duty to warn, cultural factors, decision-thresholds, and helper safety, and have the opportunity to engage about these complexities during an interactive case simulation and follow-up discussion with presenters.